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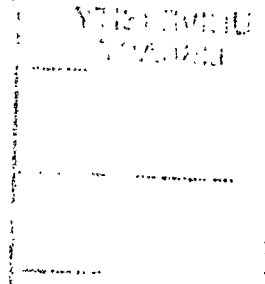
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**Reflecting on a Journey: The Development
of a Black Feminist Approach to Childhood
Sexual Abuse in Black Families**

**Submission for a PhD by Published Works
Middlesex University
July 2004**

Claudia Bernard



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Abstract

Reflecting on a Journey: The Development of a Black Feminist Approach to Childhood Sexual Abuse in Black Families

This paper is the contextualising statement as part of my submission for a PhD by published works. It seeks to explore the development of a black feminist approach to child sexual abuse discourses in my work. The central focus of the paper is an examination of the core concerns covered in my writings, notably the interconnections between race, gender and class in shaping dynamics of child sexual abuse in black families. Using a content analysis approach to re-read my writings, this paper reflects on the main themes emerging in the body of work submitted, to chart my journey as a feminist researcher and the development of the ideas in my work. In particular, it presents a reflexive examination of my writings and opens up questions about gender and race for understanding the basis of power in the research process. Drawing on a range of feminist and anti-racist thinkers, it provides a synthesis of the theoretical, methodological and epistemological bases of my writings and critically considers how the body of work comes together as a coherent whole. This paper evaluates the strengths and limitations of the research and explores the implications for the inferences that can be drawn from the analyses I have constructed. The claim is made that as the body of work discussed is original, expands feminist scholarship on child abuse, and makes an important contribution to the knowledge base of child abuse, it is thus equivalent to a PhD by conventional thesis route.

Reflecting on a Journey: The Development of a Black Feminist Approach to Childhood

Sexual Abuse in Black Families

Context Statement

Introduction

This paper is concerned with a critical exploration of the publications submitted for the award of a PhD through the route of published works. The paper is organised around three main sections. In the first section I set out the epistemological starting point of my writings before moving on to critically examine each piece, giving an outline of the way different themes have been developed in the writings. In section two a case is made for the originality of my research and I elaborate the ways it has made a significant and worthwhile contribution to the knowledge base of child abuse. Section three gives a methodological account of the research strategies that have framed the work. I combine analyses of my research methodology with critical exploration of the analytical process to weigh up the strengths and limitations of my research approach. I will sketch my development as a researcher over time and show how the works fit together and interrelate to give a detailed consideration of my journey as a researcher to explore its impact on the work that is presented here. Finally, I will discuss how the publications cited are equivalent to a doctorate earned by the traditional thesis route.

Background and Critical Review of the Selected Works

The writings that make up the submissions were written over an 8-year period and are ordered chronologically for the purposes of this discussion. They have largely derived from empirical

work, but include some theoretical work. The empirical work is based on two separate pieces of field research. The first involved a small-scale qualitative study of social work practitioners working in one local authority setting with mothers whose children had been sexually abused. This study used a non-random sample comprised of four white females, three Asian females, two Caribbean females and one white male. The breakdown broadly reflected the social composition of the social workers employed by the authority. The second piece of research is an original inquiry I conducted into representations of black mothers in child sexual abuse discourses. I employed a qualitative methodology to conduct an investigation into non-abusing black mothers' emotional and behavioural responses to the sexual abuse of their children to examine the impact of such abuse on women as mothers and partners of abusive men. The aim of the research was to explore how mothers made sense of their children's needs in the aftermath of abuse. It was also concerned to examine how these mothers experienced the intervention of statutory agencies. Specifically, the research sought to conduct a careful examination of the multi-layered interactions between black mothers, their children and families, and helping agencies in the aftermath of abuse. Between 1995-1996 I conducted in-depth interviews with 30 Black mothers who classified themselves as black British of African-Caribbean origins whose children had suffered intra-familial or extra-familial sexual abuse. It is one of the first studies in Britain to explore these issues from a black feminist perspective and it yielded a wealth of descriptive data, which formed the basis of the publications grouped under 2-7 listed below.

The research and scholarship that forms the basis of the works presented here is in the cognate area of childhood abuse. With a particular emphasis on child sexual abuse, my writings are primarily concerned with linking an analysis of race to gender to open up questions of how these

categories of experience shape reactions and responses to child abuse in black families. The theoretical orientations that have guided my work include feminist epistemological approaches, and anti-racist thought. My starting point is that while child sexual abuse has been investigated quite extensively within social work literature, the way race impacts upon victims' subjective experiences of abuse (and in particular, how race profoundly influences professional responses to sexual abuse) remains under-explored in the literature. Despite the substantial body of research on child sexual abuse in Britain, questions of race and racism as they frame experiences of sexual abuse have not been issues of central concern. In this context, my writings thus link an analysis of race to questions of gender to examine the complex relationships that interplay in different aspects of childhood sexual abuse. This is not to deny that all mothers of children who have been sexually abused might experience some similar emotions, regardless of their racial and social class backgrounds. There are, however, some important qualitative differences in the meaning that race has in the everyday lives of black mothers which will be a compounding factor in how they differently make sense of that experience, that brings with it a number of complexities for making interpretations about their behaviour.

Epistemological bases of my work

Before moving on to consider each submission, I will outline the epistemological stance of my work to show how my conceptual framework and methodological approach have been influenced by black feminist standpoint theory.

A distinctive feature of my writing is that I have developed a black feminist approach to child sexual abuse to consider the gendered and racial consequences for those victimised. Being

acutely aware of the gaps in the knowledge base of child abuse, my work attempts to develop a black feminist perspective by advancing an understanding of a gendered analysis of race to illuminate the web of relations that inform conceptions of child abuse in black communities. Briefly described, the term black feminism as I employ it refers to a particular approach to feminism that articulates how the intersecting effects of gender, race and class contribute to the oppression of black women (Athey, 1996). Black feminism is a philosophical perspective, as well as a political movement that has at its core analyses of the interrelationship of gender and race for the development of a feminist perspective of epistemology that addresses questions of race and racism. It is important to emphasise that the term black feminism is most often used to describe the writings of those, usually black women who possess some form of feminist consciousness (Hill Collins, 1990). Indeed, as Hill Collins maintains, merely being a black woman writing about black women does not by itself make one's work feminist. Key black feminist thinkers covering a range of disciplines have been Carby (1992), Crenshaw (1994 & 2000), Davis (1981), Hill Collins (1990), hooks (1989), Lorde (1984), and Mama (1995). Fundamentally, black feminist thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic advocate a critical social theory that has at its heart what Kimberlie Crenshaw refers to as the intersectionality discourse (Crenshaw, 1994). In many ways, black feminist thought stresses the importance of the intersectionality of race and gender for the exploration of a range of topics about the black experience.

A number of thinkers from a range of perspectives within black feminisms have greatly influenced my intellectual development and their particular insights informed my analyses in the pieces of writings discussed in this paper (for instance, Crenshaw, 1994; Hill Collins, 1990;

hooks, 1984 & 1989; King, 1988). A Black feminist standpoint arises from an oppositional stance and refers to black women's "unique angle of vision on self, community and society and the theories that interpret these experiences" (Hill Collins, 1990: 22). Such an approach asserts that black women's multiple social locations produce specific understandings of their racialised, gendered, and classed positions in societies where these dimensions are significant markers of experience. The major proposition in black feminist standpoint theory is that black women's histories, situated within the legacy of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and patterns of migration, profoundly shape the way they experience and construct their understandings of their social world. Thus, a central tenet of a black feminist standpoint is that the universal knowledge claims made about women's experiences are called into question by turning attention to the role of power in underscoring how knowledge is generated, acquired and produced to marginalise and exclude the voices of those who are oppressed. Black feminist standpoint essentially challenges the assumption that western and Eurocentric forms of knowledge are the only valid ways of knowing (Graham, 2002).

Core themes within a black feminist standpoint approach are the notion of subjugated knowledge and the "outsider-within" status. In considering subjugated knowledge Hill Collins (1990) contends that the standpoints of oppressed groups are suppressed or discredited by those more powerful in society. Such a view suggests that powerful groups are able to shape the content of knowledge and to decide what knowledge is legitimate. Thus, Hill Collins advances the argument that the "outsider-within" status functions to create new angles of vision for validating the knowledge claims of subordinate groups (Hill Collins, 1990: 11). Hill Collins ultimately stresses that the "outsider-within" status gives black women unique insights into the nature of society and this position gives them privileged access to particular ways of knowing.

Accordingly, the claim is made that black feminists are ideally placed for creating an oppositional discourse (Hill Collins, 1990; James, 2000). Black feminist standpoint theory therefore provides the conceptual tools for critical inquiry to create alternative epistemologies of how oppressed groups create knowledge that enables them to represent the “truths” of their lived realities.

Nonetheless, disagreements exist between thinkers about the limitations of black feminist standpoint theory. The starting point of their critique is that a standpoint theory assumes that only the “authentic insider” can speak of a group’s oppression (Harding, 1987). As Brah points out, it is as if, “the act of naming oneself as a member of an oppressed group was assumed to vest one with moral authority” (Brah, 2000: 438). It is important to recognise that there is a danger that some black feminist thinkers may fail to acknowledge their different social locations and not pay sufficient attention to significant differences based on other axes of division such as class, sexual orientation, religion, education, culture and ethnicity that can separate black women from one another (hooks, 1989; Lorde, 1984; Smith, 1983). More particularly it is also worth stressing that positioning ourselves as “situated knowers” presupposes that we know what all black women’s experiences are, and in so doing, we may fail to capture the intricate ways black women from diverse social backgrounds interpret their own oppression. I am powerfully reminded that though women may have a shared identity it is an assumption that they will have a shared worldview. More fundamentally, analyses that foreground only commonalities will reproduce the very power relations they claim to challenge by failing to problematise the fact that it is predominantly middle-class black women researching the “other” – that is typically working-class black women. There are no easy answers to these thorny issues. It is for this

reason that I invoke reflexivity as an important starting-point to critique the notion of myself as a “situated knower” to challenge implicit assumptions about homogeneity of experience among black women (Hill Collins, 1990). I illustrate this point in my discussion under submission four where I explore issues of power and difference between black women in the research context.

As I highlight on page 3 of *Constructing Lived Experiences* (discussed under submission 7) part of my goal was to challenge the dominant hegemony of Eurocentric conceptualisation of black families. Thus, a black feminist standpoint position provided me with an overall explanatory framework for developing my perspective. As the intersection of multiple forms of oppression in the area of gender-based violence were prevalent themes in my works, a black feminist standpoint position helped shape my thinking about gendered issues in the context of race for opening up a debate that requires the complex analysis of specific factors pertaining to child sexual abuse in black families. As noted in chapter one of *Constructing Lived Experiences*, I came to this research with a strong commitment to making visible the gender-based violence experienced by black women and children and give voice to the inherent contradictions involved in speaking publicly about this controversial issue in black communities. I am reminded of an observation made by West (2004) about the importance of uncovering the truth of an experience, even when that truth is not so popular. Principally, a black feminist standpoint provided me with the conceptual tools to open up new ways for understanding violence and abuse in black women and children’s lives. Coming from a perspective that is working at the intersection of feminism and anti-racism a black feminist standpoint theory gave me a framework for understanding the complexities embodied in black women’s experiences and thus enabled me to develop the conceptual tools necessary for studying marginalized and oppressed groups. In particular, Hill

Collins, (1990) “outsider-within” position of black women academics; Crenshaw’s (1994), intersectionality discourse and King’s (1988) simultaneity of oppression theory have been guiding conceptual frameworks for me to develop core themes in my writing. Additionally, hooks, notion of theorising from everyday experiences and “talking back” as an act of empowerment (hooks, 1984 & 1989) helped me to appreciate how voice can be understood as a form of resistance. As hooks asserts:

It is the act of speech, of “talking back” that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice (hooks, 1989: 9).

Let me turn now to how I took these ideas forward by illustrating how key concepts within black feminisms helped me in the analytical process to build the arguments that I articulated of mothers’ responses to the abuse of their children. Specifically, I focus on the concept of divided loyalties to show how my interpretation of the data was rooted within the broad theoretical project of black feminism. Essentially, three distinguishing features of black feminist theory have been drawn upon for developing my analyses. These were: (1) the belief that knowledge must be grounded in black women’s lived experiences (hooks, 1991); (2) the intersectionality paradigm (Crenshaw, 2000; and (3) the “outsider-within” notion that provides black feminist scholars with a unique standpoint from which to understand black women’s particular experiences (Hill Collins, 1990). With these considerations in mind, black feminist knowledge provided conceptual tools for the interpretation of the data and, largely determined the approach

I took, as well as the areas that I focused on. As Glaser & Strauss (1967) note, the researcher must have a perspective in order to see relevant data and abstract significant categories from it. Everitt, et al (1992) have also stressed the importance of acknowledging that in data analysis we essentially call upon our existing knowledge to understand what we see.

As the overall goal of this research was to develop insights into how the broader context of mothers' experiences are significant in framing their responses to the abuse of their children, black feminist knowledge claims guided my analysis to capture the meanings they attached to relationships with their families and communities for developing the notion of divided loyalties. Specifically, I utilised the simultaneity of oppression concept for an integrative analysis of race and gender to uncover some of the essential elements of the complex networks of relationships within which mothers' kinship ties are embedded, to understand how conflictual loyalties are created. In particular, the intersectionality paradigm was an important conceptual tool for analysing the convergence of race and gender to explicate the meanings associated with the emotional turmoil and ambivalence underlying mothers' help-seeking routes. It is worth emphasising also that the concept of "double consciousness" (Du Bois, 1989), which is defined as seeing yourself through the eyes of how others see you, provided me with a starting point from which to formulate hypotheses to explore the relevance of the psychological effects of racism on mothers. Crucially, this enabled me to explore the effects of racism, for identifying the factors that had the greatest bearing on them, to elicit how internalised racism (that is where mothers have internalised devaluing messages about blackness that demean and stereotype) played a role for some mothers to frame conceptions of the self, and by implication how they conceived of what it means to be a good mother. Moreover, I was provided with conceptual

tools to analyse how they understood their children's maltreatment in terms of the consequences of racism. In short, black feminist analytical insights offered ways of conceptualising the complex and multi-faceted nature of mothers' emotional and behavioural responses in the aftermath of their children's abuse to untangle the contradictions arising around competing interests and conflictual relationships, precisely because they were living with the experience of multiple oppression. More fundamentally, black feminist thinking served as a guide by providing an overarching framework for me to conceptualise mothers' experiences and assign meanings to how they navigated the complex terrain of race and gender that shaped their responses to their children's victimisation.

Whilst black feminist knowledge offered ways to formulate propositions to facilitate understandings of mothers' responses, I recognise that there are, however, limitations with the approach that I took. One danger is that there could be a bias in how I interpreted the mothers' experiences. As Opie asserts, feminist interpretations can appropriate the data to the researcher's interests (Opie, 1992). Also the charge of imposing my own construction and interpretation on the mothers that better reflects my worldview could be made (Patton, 1990). In truth, my particular background, experience, and theoretical orientation significantly shaped how I interpreted mothers' accounts to develop my analysis. Similarly, my prior knowledge of child sexual abuse and its dynamics, as well as my particular ways of knowing - by that I mean my feminist consciousness - all interplay to influence how I explained, or gave emphasis to some things and not to others to produce a specific interpretation of mothers' accounts. All this underlines the importance of stressing that as a black feminist researcher, I do not claim objectivity, but offer my perspective as one possible way of making sense of mothers' accounts.

Yet, at the same time a reflexive stance served to alert me to the dangers of bending the data to suit my theoretical position (Featherstone, 2000). Featherstone cautions that our theoretical perspective significantly influences how we read interview data. King's (1996) analysis of self-reflexivity also made me particularly aware of how my theoretical lens could inform what I see and bias my interpretation of mothers' accounts. I borrow the concept of "empathic neutrality" which recognises that my approach to the research is 'not value free, but that I endeavour to make my assumptions transparent (Snape & Spencer, 2003).

Method

Before moving on to discuss the works described below, it is perhaps worth saying something briefly about the method I am using to read and critically review my work. I utilised a form of content analysis as a methodological approach for analysing my texts. This method uses a set of procedures to make inferences about the messages conveyed in the text (Weber, 1990). As a research approach it involves establishing analytic categories and identifying when these categories are used in the text (Silverman, 1993). For the purposes of re-reading my texts for this context statement the content categories that I have created for analysis are some of the key themes arising in the text, which centred on marginalisation, oppression, conflictual emotions, gendered and racialised understandings, the meaning of lived experiences, questions of voice and experience and trauma and recovery. Content analysis requires counting instances of when these themes recur in the texts. Ultimately, my aim is to re-read my works through the analytical lens of race and gender to evaluate the strengths and limitations of my argument, but most importantly, to consider the developmental process of my scholarship. Specifically, analysing my text for the purposes of doing a critical review for this paper required me to utilise a

methodological approach that foregrounds the notion that all knowledge is socially situated and culturally specific (Mama, 1995; Reinharz, 1992). In essence, the challenge for me is how to be critically reflective about what I am reading concerning what I had written with some distance, when it is impossible to detach myself completely from my theoretical perspective. It is important to state, that in the writings described here I took what Hart refers to as an interpretive approach, as my overall aim was to theorise experiences that are infused with multiple meanings and where it could be argued there are many versions of truths (Hart, 1998). Thus, content analysis as an approach seemed particularly suited to this project, because as a method it facilitates the systematic reading of texts in which the intention is to identify underlying patterns and themes for analysing meanings that are mediated and thus interpretive.

Submission 1:

Bernard, C. (1994) Social Work with Mothers Whose Children have been Sexually Abused, in C. Lupton & T. Gillespie (eds) *Working with Violence*, Basingstoke: MacMillan, pp. 96-112, ISBN 0-333-56743-9.

This paper arose out of a small-scale piece of qualitative research that I conducted in 1991 for my MA dissertation. Briefly, the study focused on how mothers are constructed in child protection work and consisted of in-depth interviews with social work practitioners to investigate how they incorporated feminist knowledge in working with mothers of sexually abused children. Sociological theories of gender and familial ideology, and a feminist approach to research informed the study. I was invited by the editors of “*Working with Violence*” to write a chapter

based on my research and it gave me a good opportunity to develop a perspective about the way dominant ideology affected the discourse on mothers in social work. The paper developed the idea of feminist social work practice in work with mothers as a means of developing anti-oppressive practice frameworks. Drawing on the data this paper critically examined the organisational resistance to practitioners' attempts to develop a feminist practice. It is hard to believe now, but when I started this piece of research in 1990, child sexual abuse was not as high profile as it is now. Keep in mind to that child sexual abuse as a category for registering children on Social Services child protection registers had only just come into force in 1989 following the furore of the Cleveland Crisis in 1987 (Campbell, 1988). Much has been written in the past two decades or so about child sexual abuse. However, at the time of doing this research, there was very little feminist literature on the subject (MacLeod & Saraga, 1988) and even less from a black perspective or that analysed the way race interrelated with abuse (Driver & Droisen, 1989). Much of what was written about mothers was located within a mother-blaming discourse. My thinking then, was that the attitudes towards mothers that were rooted in a mother-blaming discourse required a paradigm shift. Because the mother-blaming discourse was so prevalent (Miller, 1990), the notion that social workers' ideological starting point played a powerful role in contributing to the outcomes for mothers with the concomitant effect on their children was something I wanted to explore further. This theoretical starting point motivated me into wanting to hear directly from mothers themselves about how they understood the effects of abuse on the children in its aftermath.

Looking back on this piece of research I would argue that I was breaking new ground as a practitioner-researcher. Much has now been written about practitioner-research and in particular,

practice led research, but in the early 1990s this was not the case. Indeed, research was seen as something academics did, not practitioners. The popular image was academics talking to each other in a language only they could comprehend. The disjuncture between the research produced by professional researchers and what Fook calls, on-the-ground knowledge embodied in the day-to-day experience of practitioners was wide (Fook, 2000: 107). Reflecting on this piece of work, I am powerfully put in touch with the passion I felt for wanting to make this subject visible from a feminist perspective, and I am simultaneously reminded of the rage I experienced in practice when having to work with mothers and children in the aftermath of abuse. Undoubtedly, this was a motivating factor for me in wanting to contribute to a paradigm shift through my research and writing. Most importantly, I am reminded of my goal to make theory useful by grounding it in the lived realities of experiences. However, I can now clearly see the gaps in my analysis. Specifically, I can see that my analysis of race from a feminist perspective was less developed in this piece of writing. One factor was that the body of black feminist writings was not around at that time and came much later in the 1990s. These issues, as I have indicated earlier, have been instrumental in helping me to develop my theoretical orientation. In spite of these limitations though, I would contend that my work advanced knowledge of the complexities and dilemmas that arose for practitioners in how to keep a focus on the needs of children while at the same time work in an empowering way with their mothers. This has been a constant theme in subsequent pieces of my writing. So overall, in terms of charting the development in my scholarship, the decision to broaden my perspective to involve mothers of abused children as subjects in research were influenced by this piece of work.

Submission 2:

Bernard, C. (1994) The Research Process: Dynamics of Race, Gender and Class. *Research Policy and Planning: The Journal of Social Services Research Group*, 12: 2, pp. 20-22, ISBN 0264-519X.

This paper was written for the purpose of presenting to a conference on feminist research methodology organised jointly by the Universities of Portsmouth and Southampton in 1994. I was invited to do a presentation on feminist research to include a perspective that analytically explored the interwoven nature of race and gender in research. As it happened, the conference was later cancelled, but I was asked to adopt the paper for the *Journal of Research Policy and Planning*, which had intended to publish some of the conference proceedings in a special edition. Though at the time I experienced serious self-doubt in seeing myself as a knowledge producer (something that I still have some ambivalence about), it gave me a chance to develop my writing on the relationship between feminism and methodology. Specifically, this paper gave me a good opportunity to find my voice for broadening the debate on feminist research to interrogate what West (1999) calls the “universally applicable assertions that are derived from white women” (p2). My project here was to explore feminist research at the intersection of gender and race for the applicability to researching black women and the grounded realities of their situations. It addressed the main area of the epistemological and methodological concerns of feminist research from a black feminist standpoint. What I sought to do in this paper was to explore the ways that black women’s experiences have been constructed through an intersection of race, gender and class to consider the implications for research that does not objectify and negatively reinforce

power relations in the research process. I was chiefly interested in exploring the notion that feminist research is centrally research by women (Stanley & Wise, 1983) and at the core of feminist research is subjectivity and personal experience (Stanley & Wise, 1990). At the time of writing this piece I had very little access to black feminist writings specifically on research methodology (Mama, 1989; Phoenix, 1994), though I was able to draw on writings on black feminist standpoint epistemology (Bhavnani, 1994; Hill Collins, 1991; hooks, 1984). Crucially, in this paper I suggest that unless differences between women constructed around race and class are interrogated in research then the analysis will be limited in offering suggestions for dealing with the complex processes of research that is grounded in black women's lived experiences. However, on re-reading this work I can see the limitations in my analysis. What this re-reading process has made clear, for example, is although I set out to explore race, gender and class in the paper, I did not provide a thorough enough analysis to situate class matters within the discussion of gender and race. It can be argued that I do not articulate explicitly enough how class affected the social construction of black women's gendered and racialised identities and the implications for their participation in research (hooks, 1989). In this regard, I underestimate the complexities of class, as it is simultaneously interwoven with race and gender dynamics in black women's lives. Most importantly, in reviewing this paper, it would seem that my lack of analysis of class stems partly from my ambivalence about my own class background and where I am located now as a black, middle-class woman. Without a doubt, my unexplored assumptions regarding class powerfully affected my capacity to interrogate these issues in relation to black women, thus, I obscured the complicated ways in which class intersect with race and gender in research. Were I to be writing this paper now, I would most certainly approach the issue of class differently to address some of the limitations in my discussion. In particular, I would draw on bell hooks'

insightful text, “*Where we Stand: Class Matters*” (2000) in which she explores class stratification among black women, to help deepen my thinking about class in terms of how it is articulated in black women’s lives to shape subjectivity and personal experience. Using hooks’ insights as an example, I would draw out more clearly not only the heterogeneity of black women’s experiences but especially, the ways class positions the relationship between those being researched, and the researcher and its impact on the research process.

Submission 3:

Bernard, C. (1997) Black Mothers Emotional and Behavioural Responses to the Sexual Abuse of Their Children, in, G. Kaufman Kantor & J. L. Jasinski (eds) *Out of the Darkness: Contemporary Perspectives on Family Violence*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp 80-89, ISBN 0-7619-0776-9.

This paper is a contribution to an international text, and articulates the idea that categories of race, gender and class are central to developing paradigms of child sexual victimisation. It reported on some of my research findings and I contend that paying attention to what is going on emotionally, psychologically and socially for mothers is of critical importance. The assumptions underlying my argument is that these issues interweave in the mothering process and have an impact on how the mothers were able to nurture and protect their children in the aftermath of abuse. Central to my analysis is that mothers’ emotional and behavioural responses cannot be decontextualised from the broader social context of their lived experiences. The specificities of black mothers’ parenting in a context of insurmountable difficulties is a dominant focus in this

paper. Using case studies drawn from the research I focus on the intersectionality of race and gender to illustrate the tensions and dilemmas for mothers. In revisiting this paper, I can see now that I do not offer much in the way of practical recommendations of how the research findings can be utilised for developing evidence based practice. That is a notable limitation if I want my work to influence social work practice.

Submission 4:

Bernard, C. (1998) 'Race, Gender and Class in Child Sexual Abuse Research' in M. Lavalette, L. Penketh, & C. Jones (eds) *Anti-Racism and Social Welfare*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 325-339, ISBN 1 84014 507 2.

This paper expands my discussion of methodological reflections on race and gender in research started in the paper in submission 2. It further developed my discussion of the research process and explores methodological implications of feminist writings about research as well as ethical issues that arise in researching the sensitive topic of sexual abuse. In this paper I argue that qualitative research is better able to explore behaviour that is infused with multiple interpretations, and I considered the implications for feminist writing that does not include race as a category for analysis. I explored the research process in more depth here because I wanted to have a reflexive examination of the assumptions and principles that underpinned the research approach that I adopted. Significantly, this paper was an attempt to articulate some of the uncertainties contradictions and tensions I experienced as a researcher, and especially perceptions of myself as a knowledge producer. As can be seen from this paper, it explored the

theme of power relationships in negotiating access to respondents, and interrogates the multifaceted layers of power that come into play in the research process. On re-reading this piece I can see that the themes of race and gender are prevalent as I attempt to problematise the relationship between myself, as the researcher and my respondents. It is clear that the concepts of objectivity, neutrality and reflexivity are dominant themes in my discussion. Whilst the paper discussed in submission 2 provided more of a critique of feminist research methodologies, this paper expanded my analysis by exploring in greater depth the complexities of studying women who are the same race as me but are differently located in terms of class, education and status, as well as how I locate myself as a black feminist researcher.

The stimulus to write this paper came about because I had started to present my ideas as works in progress at conferences and was thus able to receive constructive feedback in an intellectually stimulating environment. On re-reading this paper, I am powerfully reminded of experiences that deepened my insights and played a critical role in my development process because they forced me to subject the research process to critical scrutiny. For example, I am able to reflect on one experience of receiving a stinging rebuke from a black woman delegate at the *Women and the Law Conference* that took place at the University of London in 1994. This delegate accused me of positioning myself as the “expert” and claiming the authority to speak on behalf of all black women, and she especially questioned my location in a University (something she perceived as a white male-dominated institution) as having a bearing on my credibility as a researcher of black women. It is important to note that the conference attendees were largely made up of grassroots feminist activists working in the domestic violence and rape crises movements, some of whom were openly hostile to feminists like myself who were located in

academic institutions. Although I believe the criticism to be unfounded, I am aware of how assumptions can be made about a researcher depending on where she is located. I could see from the point of view of other black women how being a member of a subordinate group in a powerful white patriarchal institution could be perceived, for as Rassool (1995) notes, black women are generally perceived as passive and powerless in organisations. At the time, how I made sense of that encounter was to assume that it was a way of testing me, that is, assessing my credibility as an “authentic” black woman. This is not to suggest that I dismissed the criticism outright. I was acutely aware of the danger of approaching my research as if all black women speak with one voice; after all, there is not a shared reality. Nevertheless, this delegate’s rebuke evoked for me feelings of self-doubt, and raised issues about power, authenticity, sameness, difference, and most importantly, ambivalence about seeing myself as a knowledge producer. These are all issues I critically reflect upon in this paper, which helped me to think through the issues and grapple with the complexities inherent in straddling multiple locations in the research process. Most importantly, this criticism helped me to think critically about power in the research process and contributed to my development as a researcher, as well as how I positioned myself as a knowledge producer.

In particular, my analysis of these issues is rooted in Hill Collins’ concept of the outsider within paradigm (Hill Collins, 1990) as a backdrop to explore the contradictions, complexities and uncertainties brought up for me, and developed my thinking about power in the research process. Hill Collins developed the ‘outsider within’ paradigm to describe people like myself who find themselves in marginal locations between groups and varying power (Hill Collins, 1998: 5). Most importantly, Hill Collins’ concept gave me a framework to interrogate questions of

sameness and difference in the context of race in the research process. Hill Collins' theory elucidated the inherent tensions and contradictions that exist for me as a black feminist researcher located in a predominantly white academic institution doing research about black women in different social classes. The work of hooks (1989) also gave me a framework for developing the conceptual tools for thinking through the issues and reflecting on the processes, whilst not losing sight of the importance of developing my own distinct voice. Although I did not explicitly name this process as reflexivity in the paper, I can see now that implicitly I was developing a reflexive stance in my work. I believe as a result of the exploration I embarked on in this paper, I was able to develop my thinking to have a much more detailed discussion about the research process and reflexivity in chapter 3 of my book *Constructing Lived Experiences* (submission 7).

Submission 5:

Bernard, C. (1999) 'Child Sexual Abuse and the Black Disabled Child' *Disability & Society*, 14:3 pp. 325-339, ISSN 0968 7599.

This paper examined an important topic, namely the interlocking dimensions of race, gender and disability in the context of sexual abuse. Utilising material gathered from my study of black mothers' responses to the sexual abuse of their children, I switch my analysis to take a child-focused stance and explore the complex unmet needs of disabled children. The impetus for this paper came about when I reported on the results of my study of black mothers at *the International Congress on Child Abuse & Neglect* in Dublin (Bernard, 1996). Important to

mention here that at that conference disability was not the main focus of my presentation, but the issue was picked up in the ensuing discussion. At the time I had not drawn out any special analysis in relation to disability; only making passing reference to the fact that a number of the mothers' children had disabilities. I was subsequently invited to speak at another conference that was focusing specifically on the sexual abuse of disabled children and as a result I developed this paper. I used, as illustrative material, some case studies that emerged from the study of mothers to address the problems that the linkages of race, gender, and disability pose for black disabled children who were sexually abused. The argument presented in this paper is that these combined factors are a terrain of power relations for black disabled children. The strengths of the paper are that it illuminates that children with disabilities are at increased risk of being victimised and that black disabled children have some particular needs that are under-explored in the literature. Nonetheless, one criticism that could be levelled at this paper is that it relies on a small sample of illustrative data. However, as I have emphasised in that paper, I make no claims in my analysis to cover the full spectrum of issues that affect all black children with disabilities who are sexually victimised. The primary goal of this paper was to bring to the surface some critical issues and link the intersection of race, gender and disability to an analysis of sexual abuse. Whilst I am making no claims that all black disabled children will experience the world in the same way, I do feel it is pertinent to argue that they have some collective experiences that need to be highlighted. So, although the backdrop to this paper was mothers' accounts, I was able to develop my analysis and take a child-focus perspective to show the many contradictions for black disabled children who are sexually abused. In doing so, I provide a unique understanding of black disabled children's experience therefore I am arguing that this paper is a contribution to emergent theoretical knowledge.

Submission 6:

Bernard, C. (2000) 'Shifting the Margins: Black Feminist Perspectives on Discourses of Mothers in Child Sexual Abuse' in J. Radford, M. Friedberg, L. Harne (eds) *Women, Violence and Strategies for Action*, Open University Press, Buckingham, pp 103-119, ISBN 0-335-20369-8.

Adopting a black feminist approach, this paper examines the web of relations in which meaning is constructed for black mothers. In this paper, I was especially attuned to a feminist audience, but I was conscious that I needed to also reach those who may not be sensitive or sympathetic to a feminist approach but nonetheless have to intervene in families to secure the safety of children. My exploration here, I would contend, provided insights to appreciate the significance, and indeed the importance of taking on board issues of gender, race and power to understand their role in influencing how black mothers perceive their concerns and priorities. I used margins as a metaphor to critique much feminist writing on mothers in child sexual abuse discourses and used examples from the data to illustrate my argument. The assumption underlying my approach in this piece is that black women's perspectives are always on the margins of feminist analysis – that is they are never at the centre. Writing this contribution for a text that advanced an explicitly feminist agenda gave me the creative and intellectual space to develop a black feminist piece for putting forward an alternative perspective that not only illuminates the misconceptions and mother-blaming discourse that permeates social work practice (Miller, 1990), but most importantly, exposes the contradictions for black mothers.

Submission 7:

Bernard, C. (2001) '*Constructing Lived Experiences: Representations of Black Mothers in Child Sexual Abuse Discourses*' Ashgate, Aldershot. ISBN 1-84014-938-8.

This book reports on my study of black mothers' responses to the abuse of their children more comprehensively and examines the intersections of race and gender in framing black mothers' emotional and behavioural responses to the sexual abuse of their children. The central concern of this book is to make visible the multifaceted nature of mothers' responses to the abuse of their children. The first chapters set the scene and the theoretical literature is outlined. The text critiques and reviews the literature on child sexual abuse and gives a good introduction to a number of key areas pertaining to black families. In particular, Chapters' four, five and six draws extensively on the empirical data to examine women's accounts of their experiences of mothering in the aftermath of abuse, their emotional reactions, and their coping strategies. It presents a black feminist investigation to critically evaluate the complexities for mothers around ambivalence, loyalty, power and powerlessness.

In developing a paradigm that is grounded in an understanding of gendered power relationships within black families, this book develops the idea of divided loyalty to explore the implications for black mothers' help-seeking and protective strategies. Specifically, I use the concept of divided loyalty to unravel the emotional and behavioural responses of mothers. Especially, the effects of the abuse on mothers' parenting are posited to analyse the particular ways their

mothering roles are impacted in the aftermath of abuse. A limitation of the book is that I did not develop an analysis around the number of mothers who were themselves sexually abused as children. Significantly, I can see that I might have developed my discussion to consider whether mothers' own unresolved traumas stemming from abuse had an impact on their capacity to be attuned to the emotional and safety needs of their children. My thinking now is that because I argue that children's safety and long-term emotional needs can be enhanced by effective intervention with non-abusing mothers, I needed to have explored these dimensions in more depth to consider the identification of risk situations for black children whose mothers were themselves survivors of abuse. However, because I elucidate that not only do mothers have to come to grips with the societal racism that construct their parenting as deficit, whilst at the same time grapple with complex gendered power relations in their families, this book offers a new perspective and expands our understanding of the effects of child sexual abuse in black families. This study of mothers offers the opportunity to expand the knowledge base of child sexual abuse as a means of developing a more critically reflective practice with black families.

Submission 8:

Bernard, C. (2002) 'Giving Voice to Experiences: Parental Maltreatment of Black Children in the Context of Societal Racism' *Child & Family Social Work*, 7: 4 pp 239-251, ISSN 1356-7500.

Building upon the exploration of experience and voice, in this paper my attention turns to those who are victims through physical and sexual abuse, and their capacity to give voice to their

trauma in the recovery process. Through the analytical lens of race and gender, I examine the relationship between experience and voice to emphasise the factors that constrain and enable black children to give voice to experiences of familial maltreatment. Drawing on writings from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives including, psychology, social work, sociology and feminist thought, this paper provides a theoretical analysis of the relational dynamics of black children's lives. The first section begins with a review of the literature on trauma and recovery. It then moves on to look at the process of naming experiences as abusive for black children, to explore the particular complexities in giving voice to experiences. The paper sought to explore the social, psychological and emotional factors that contribute to naming experiences of trauma. It discusses different categories of abuse to consider their impact on attachment, emotional well-being, and being able to speak the truth of one's experience. My motivation for turning my attention to the voices of those recovering from abuse was influenced largely by my research with mothers. One of my concerns in the research with mothers was how they constructed their own specificities (Lewis, 1996). Nonetheless, in analysing some of the mothers' accounts, I was left with some anxieties as to whether the safety needs of some children were compromised because the mothers in question were either too distraught or sidetracked by their own emotional crises to be able to attune empathetically to the emotional needs of their children. Most definitely, in terms of developing my ideas, it illuminated most powerfully for me the key themes around children's rights, and perceptions of what constitute harmful behaviour. Analysing mothers' accounts in this research opened up questions for me about perceptions of risk and notions of recovery and mothers' capacity to meet the needs of their children when their own emotional needs remained unmet. I thus became most interested in exploring the issues from the point of view of children and young people. The factors involved in safeguarding

children's welfare whilst working in an empowering way with carers are a challenge for professionals and there are some tensions. This motivated me to explore the voices and perspectives of those victimised by familial maltreatment. It was important for me to examine cultural cues around gender and race that foster a negative valuation of the self to consider the implications for coming to voice in the aftermath of familial maltreatment.

How the Works Relate to Each Other.

From an examination of the writings submitted here I propose that the works are related to each other epistemologically, theoretically and methodologically. The main point I wish to stress is that the works join together as a coherent whole and are deeply anchored within a black feminist area of social theory. In particular, the works are conceptually linked by three main themes: the interrelationship between gender and race; questions of voice and experience; and explorations of the consequences of childhood abuse. Arguably, the overarching theme framing all the works discussed here is how the interaction of race and gender oppression effect the way trauma ensuing from familial maltreatment is experienced, understood and named. An important feature of the development of my work has been naming and giving voice to visible and marginalised experiences. These have been recurrent themes in my work, and these elements connect the different pieces of writing.

Firstly, epistemologically, my work is concerned with the construction of knowledge, and critiques the bodies of knowledge in the field of child abuse, and essentially questions the limits of feminist scholarship to address these concerns. As I have discussed earlier, my theoretical starting point is an examination of the intersection of race and gender in shaping how

experiences are constituted. It is important to note that how experiences are constituted is a constant theme linking the works to each other conceptually. Secondly, my writing focuses on the myriad ways in which the analytical categories of race and gender compound the experience of abuse and shape conceptions of, and responses to child abuse in black families. Thirdly, though focusing on different topics, the recurrent themes in these writings address the importance of particularised methodologies (Back & Solomos, 2000) for giving voice to hidden and marginalised experiences, themes that are important not only for scholarship and research in social work, but gender and anti-racist studies. The linkages between the different pieces of work are made clear by the way the connection between the research and lessons for child care policy and practice are drawn out in different ways to facilitate a synthesis of theory and practice. The relationship between different themes in my writing comes together most strongly in my book, *Constructing Lived Experiences*, discussed in submission 7.

Evidence and Exemplification of Claims Made that the Research Constitutes a Significant and Original Contribution to Knowledge

In this section I discuss the originality of my work and identify ways in which it is making a unique contribution to the knowledge base of child abuse. Firstly, I look at how my work contributes to and expands feminist scholarship on child abuse. Secondly, I move on to demonstrate how my work is contributing to academic and professional discourse and knowledge and the evidence base of professional practice.

In evaluating how my work has made an original contribution, I want to draw attention to three noteworthy points to elucidate what this body of work has to offer the field of knowledge in

child maltreatment. First, the uniqueness of my work is that it is grounded in original research, located within a coherent framework and articulates a perspective about the complex matrix of oppression, thus making an important and original contribution to the knowledge base of child abuse. Second, my broader project of developing a black feminist approach to looking at child and family social work is building on existing knowledge whilst at the same time opening up new and important questions about a gendered analysis of race as a compounding factor in the specific dynamics of child maltreatment in black families. The third important point to emphasise in terms of the originality of my work is that I developed analyses of multiple oppressions in black children's lives to illuminate the consequences for child protection concerns in terms of risk and harm.

In particular, my original inquiry into black mothers' perspective is inventive in that it moved beyond existing research into mothers' perspectives in its attempt to develop a theoretical framework that is rooted in an understanding of the specific aspects of the black experience. In the words of Kaufman Kantor & Jasinski 'Bernard's UK based study goes beyond previous work in the field of child sexual victimisation by suggesting that the areas of race, class, and gender are central to developing paradigms of child sexual victimisation, and our responses to their experience' (Kaufman Kantor & Jasinski, 1997: viii). In one sense, I quite rightly point out in my writings that feminist analyses of mothers in child abuse discourses have sought to show the emotional, psychological and social processes involved for mothers in the aftermath of child sexual abuse. At the same time, however, the underpinning argument of my thesis is that questions of race and racism in the lives of mothers are neglected aspects of feminist theoretical discourses. In this regard, I am arguing that these works are implicitly drawing on the white

experience as a starting point, from which generalisations are then made to other racial groups. Moreover, although in the last decade or so there has been an increase in the literature that has addressed race in child protection discourse, few of these works pay any systematic attention to gendered structures, patriarchal relations and the heterosexual norms in black families as central to an analysis of race in child abuse debates. For example, in *"Constructing Lived Experiences"*, I elucidated how there is a reluctance to engage with the complex systems of gender and power relationships in the context of race dynamics. I believe therefore that the evidence base of much social work practice with black families is flawed as a result of either a lack of consideration to questions of race, or where race is the central unit of analysis in the literature, an absence of critical reflection of issues that are at the intersections of race and gender.

What is most original about my work therefore is its attempt to engage with what I saw as the limitations of the knowledge base, and as such offers invaluable insights into how these dynamics compound the experience of sexual abuse and contributes a new and distinct voice. A central tenet of my research is to bring into sharp focus questions of race and racism to help us understand how they frame constructions of gender in the context of sexual abuse in black families. In this sense, I feel I can argue with confidence that my work is charting new territories because it is making black mothers' and children's experiences visible with all the complexities. Unquestionably, I would maintain that my work advances an understanding of the effects of child sexual abuse in black families by unraveling and explaining how intersections of structures of oppression contribute to giving voice to traumatising and stigmatising experiences. Perhaps the main achievement of my work in terms of originality is that my critical black feminist framework provides an important contribution to understanding the range of processes and

factors that shape responses to child sexual abuse in black families. Indeed, by interrogating the centrality of race and gender in child abuse in my writings, I am not only extending current feminist theory on child sexual abuse but also at the same time contributing to the black feminist standpoint epistemology.

In considering the impact and contribution of my work for its direct relevance to social work practice, what characterises it is its emphasis on practice interventions that are grounded in research evidence. A consistent theme running through a number of my papers is that in order for practitioners to make well informed professional judgements in child abuse situations involving black families they need to be able to draw on research-informed evidence that is grounded in the social context that shapes the lived realities of black people's experiences. As I argued earlier, despite the substantial body of research and scholarship on child sexual abuse in Britain, issues of gender and race are largely invisible in these works. One distinguishing feature of my work is that it makes visible the hidden aspects of the complex power dynamics in black families and suggests ways to intervene most effectively and sensitively. That is, my work articulates a critique of existing material, but also offers a clear introduction to key areas of the intersecting factors that contribute to how black children make sense of and cope with experiences of child abuse. Certainly, in exploring these issues, I advance the knowledge base of childhood sexual abuse by bringing into focus the complex set of interrelationships that exists for different members of a family to consider the implications for their help-seeking behaviour in the aftermath of the abuse. There is therefore much that is new in my writings for the research-minded practitioner to draw from for the development of a critically reflective practice (Everitt, Hardiker, Littlewood & Mullender, 1992). Among other things my writings offer a theoretical

framework that can contribute to the reflexive understanding that is necessary for evidence-based practice in a field that is constantly changing.

As Webb (2001) points out, government agencies and regulatory bodies, such as the Department of Health and the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE), encourage social workers to develop evidence-based practice. My contention is that for the development of a critically reflective evidence-based practice, practitioners need what Webb (2001) refers to as a reflexive understanding to appreciate how their own value base and ideological assumptions underlie an approach to work with black families. As Trinder (1996) noted, evidence-based practice must be rooted in an understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of social work, which are influenced by social, organisational and political variables. For me, Webb and Trinder's stance speaks to the importance of appreciating that social work is steeped in risk and uncertainties. Thus, my writings present the argument that practice interventions must be underpinned with an understanding of the complexities and ambiguities surrounding the interlocking dynamics of many forms of oppression for effective and sensitive social work practice with black families. The essential point, then, is that my writing thus enhances the knowledge base in a significant way by stimulating new areas of analyses of race and gender as a key component in black families to deepen understandings of the complex processes involved in child protection situations. The relevance of this body of work to contemporary social work practice is that it offers pointers for practitioners, policy makers, and service providers to engage with these issues if they are to recognise how they inform judgements about thresholds of concerns for determining levels of child maltreatment in black families.

In terms of originality, I believe that my research is agenda shaping because it is contributing to academic and professional discourse and knowledge. My work is having an influence on epistemological accounts of child and family welfare in a number of disciplines. A clear example of this is that in terms of reaching an academic audience, my writing is cited in key pieces of literature on child and family welfare, both in the UK and in North America (McGee & Westcott, 1996; Pringle, 1998; Murray, 1999; McGee, 2000a, 2000b; Lees, 2002; Welbourne, 2002; and, in criminology (Chigwada-Bailey, 1997); and in general social work texts (Hanmer & Statham, 1999); and in psychology (Caplan, 2000). This is evidence that my work is adding a new perspective, because academics and researchers are now building on it in their own analyses of child and family welfare debates. These and other examples suggest that my research is having an impact. For example, a recent search on the internet indicated that my book *Constructing Lived Experiences* (submission 7) is recommended reading on a number of Women's Studies and Social Work academic programmes, including the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Israel, The University of New Hampshire, and the University of California, Berkley, Chicago State University and the University of Wisconsin in the USA, The University of Cape Town in South Africa, and several social work programmes in the UK, including the Universities of Hertfordshire, Hull, Brunel, and Portsmouth. This further demonstrates that there is considerable interest in the ideas I have formulated, suggesting they hold some relevance and significance and are contributing to the education of a number of students in the social sciences and humanities. Thus, I feel that my claim that the work is making an important contribution to the knowledge base of child abuse at both national and international levels is justified.

In the absence of any systematic evaluative research evidence, it is difficult to establish how much of an impact my work is having on social work practice. However, I am regularly invited to give presentations to academic and professional audiences at a number of major national and international conferences (Bernard, 1995a; 1995b; 1996; 1997; 1998; 1999; 2000; 2001) as well as conducting seminars in the workplace for practitioners and managers (Bernard, 2002). In some ways, these conferences and seminars have provided a public forum for me to discuss my work and receive constructive feedback, which has contributed to the development of my ideas. Crucially, these professional forums have been undeniably important not only for me to bring my research to practice, but most importantly have offered a stimulating space for me to engage in critical debates with those active at the frontline of the work with children and families, about the strengths and limitations of my research. For the most part, a key task of these forums has been to extrapolate the policy and practice implications of the research findings for work with children and families, and to highlight how practitioners can understand and use research evidence to facilitate evidence-based practice (Webb, 2002). Ideas from debates and discussion in symposiums, seminars, and conferences where I presented my work gave rise to my developing areas of writing I had not considered; for example the topic of disability and child abuse discussed in submission 5 is a case in point. I would argue that my research is thus contributing to the research based knowledge of practice and professional development in the field of child and family welfare.

I maintain therefore that my work remains at the forefront of academic research in my field because it is unique in demonstrating how multiple discourses contribute to debates about black families. In short, I have developed a critical black feminist voice and essentially, my thinking

makes an original contribution by expanding on the debate about feminist approaches to social work with children and families. This is a key advancement in the child and family social work literature. In the UK, a book by a black academic with an explicit feminist focus on gender and race in child and family work is new and distinctive. As Barn noted in her review of *Constructing Live Experiences*: 'Bernard's book, based on original empirical findings, addresses this imbalance and thereby makes an important contribution' (Barn, 2003: 134). As suggested previously, what distinguishes my writing is my bringing together of feminist knowledge with anti-racist thinking in child maltreatment for the development of a critically reflective practice. In so doing, I am adding a distinctive black feminist perspective for application to social work with black children and families, whilst at the same time strengthening and expanding feminist epistemological frameworks.

Finally, in reflecting on the originality of my work I can see that in my approach to the subject matter I am careful not to make the mistake of only seeing race as the most important variable shaping experiences. I am mindful not to do what White accuses some black feminist thinkers of doing, that is falling into the essentialist trap of assuming a unified experience for all black people (White, 2001: 65). Furthermore, although I argue that my writings advance a black feminist approach to child sexual abuse in black families, at the same time I am also careful not to put forward my perspective as the only valid one, nor claim to provide all the answers. I could not make such assertions, since my work represents but one perspective and I could not possibly make universal claims for black families. I am acutely aware that there are many voices of black feminism from diverse critical schools, and my writings offer but one perspective. The point I am making is that although my work advances an understanding of multiple discourses of race

and gender in child abuse, it is not without limitations. In re-reading the writings presented here, I am powerfully reminded of the importance of being critically aware of my own position and location for shaping how these infuse my writings.

Methodological Account of the Research Strategies that have Framed the Work

What follows is a discussion of the methodological strategies that have guided my research. As I have indicated earlier, the writings discussed in submissions 1-7 are the basis of two separate research projects: an examination of social workers' attitudes in working with mothers of sexually abused children, and a study exploring the factors that impact black mothers' reactions and responses to the sexual abuse of their children. Submission 8 is a largely theoretical analysis. In relation to the research with black mothers, a very detailed discussion of my research methodology, a description of the context in which the research was carried out, and the guiding principles that framed my research can be found in chapter 3 of my book *Constructing Lived Experiences* discussed in submission 7. For the purposes of this discussion, I have chosen to focus on three key strands of my research strategy. These are an outline of the research paradigm and philosophical traditions that influenced how I developed a feminist approach to the research, the analytical strategies and the strengths and limitations of my research. Using examples from the research into non-abusing mothers' behavioural and emotional responses to the abuse of their children, I will consider some of the ways I used grounded theory methodology together with my theoretical approach to assist in the analytical process.

As noted earlier my research is situated within the qualitative research paradigm, and my epistemological starting points are feminist approaches to research, and anti-racist theoretical

frameworks. These were the theoretical perspectives guiding both pieces of research. As I have discussed throughout this paper, feminist thinking has been the philosophical base from which I developed my methodological approach, as the significance of understanding the broader structural context in which the research is taking place was of concern for me. Additionally, an understanding of the importance of power dynamics in data-gathering and the relationship between the researcher and the researched in shaping the research process, were guiding principles underpinning my approach to research. These critical factors all largely influenced my philosophical position in the debate about qualitative research (Henwood, 1996) and critically informed how I went about the research. As I have highlighted in my discussion earlier on the epistemological stance that guided my work, feminist ways of knowing helped me to open up questions about the politics of research.

It is important to stress at the outset that a motivating factor for me to do feminist research was because of my interest in social research with marginalised groups. As I have already stressed feminist researchers in the area of child sexual abuse have not given sufficient considerations to questions of race, so offer little insight into the concerns and dilemmas for black families. I was therefore keen to develop research that provided analytical tools to explore gender relations in black family life as they impact understandings of child sexual abuse. Much has been written about feminist research and there is not an easy model that defines a distinctly feminist method of inquiry (Harding, 1987). Indeed, some argue that there is not exactly a feminist method as such (Letherby, 2003). It is important to bear in mind that feminists, as social researchers, work from a variety of perspectives and employ the range of research methods (Brunskell, 1998). As Harding (1987) notes there is a distinction between different approaches to feminist research:

feminist empiricist; feminist standpoint and feminist postmodernist. In discussing feminist research, Kelly et al (1998) notes the tendency to assume that feminist research draws largely on qualitative traditions and always has as its subjects women. Essentially, feminist research seeks to interrogate the material conditions, social, gender and cultural factors that have a major influence in shaping lived experiences (Reinharz, 1992). In some ways feminist research can be distinguished by the questions that are asked; making visible the location of the self in the research process; the power relationship between the researcher and the researched and the significance of these in shaping the research process; and a rejection of the notion of objectivity and distance from the research participants (Harding, 1987; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Humphries, et al, 2000; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1983). As I discussed in detail in the writings that make up submissions 2, 4, and 7, these factors were important considerations for me, therefore I wanted to develop research practice that opened up possibilities to gain insights into lived experiences nuanced by factors of race and gendered power relations in research. Hence, a feminist approach to research practice seemed most suited to this endeavour. Ultimately, for me, what characterises feminist research are that the socially constructed value base, and the theoretical insights framing the research must be informed by theories of gender relations (Brunskell, 1998).

In both pieces of research, when considering my method for data-gathering and analysis a number of factors influenced my decision. Most crucially, as a central goal of the research was to unravel the meanings grounded in respondents' own experiences, a qualitative approach largely informed how I went about my investigation in both pieces of research. There were several advantages to a qualitative approach. First, a qualitative approach of data-gathering and

analysis was thought to be the most appropriate method because of the nature of the evidence I was trying to produce. As Weber Cannon et al (1991) noted, in-depth qualitative research is most adept at revealing the social processes that impinge on lived experiences. Second, in relation to the study of black mothers, as one of the principal elements of the research was its exploration of meanings, a qualitative approach to research was particularly suited to examining the multiplicity of factors that contributed to understandings of child sexual abuse in black families. For example, because the research was primarily concerned with gathering detailed experiences involving very sensitive and painful issues (Lee & Renzetti, 1993) this method was thought to be most appropriate. The detailed nature of qualitative data was better able to capture the complex interplay of cultural, emotional and psychological processes that underlie black mothers' experiences, to elucidate the meanings and coping strategies adopted. Third, as I was endeavouring to research a previously under-researched area I believed that a qualitative approach would be better able to elicit the complex range of factors that influenced the research process and had an affect on the research outcomes (Silverman, 1993).

The Analytical Process

In both pieces of research, the data was gathered utilising in-depth interviews as the primary mode of data collection. In-depth interviewing using open-ended questions was particularly suited to gathering information about sensitive, uncomfortable, stigmatised, and painful issues. Additionally, in-depth interviews offered both structure and flexibility for eliciting information about participants' backgrounds and emotional responses, as well as interpretations of the meanings they gave to their children's experiences. As I pointed out in *Constructing Lived Experiences*, the interview data for this study was analysed using some of the techniques of

grounded theory methodology. Briefly described, grounded theory as an analytical approach to data analysis offers a set of procedures and techniques for developing categories, organising the data, and identifying themes for inductively generating theory from data collected in the field (Charmaz, 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is an interpretive method that has its roots in the Chicago School of Sociology and the basic premise of this approach is essentially one of generating theory from data grounded in lived experiences that are interpretive. Key elements of the grounded theory techniques that I utilised were its coding schemes, memoing and constant comparison.

Given the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, that is, mothers' narratives of the sexual abuse of their children, a grounded theory approach lends itself to the data analysis for the kind of knowledge I sought to develop about complex emotional responses and hidden processes. Because this research sought to capture the subjective meanings mothers attached to their children's abuse, grounded theory methodology offered a systematic and rigorous set of procedures and techniques for organising and making sense of large quantities of data that is rich and complex. Data collection and analysis was done concurrently; which facilitated working back and forth between data and conceptual ideas, and recognized that the research process developed in a non-linear manner. Thus, after a series of interviews were collected, they were transcribed verbatim to identify the key themes emerging for classifying and organising the data. This scheme is referred to as open coding for the identification and organisation of emergent themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Since a key task at this stage was to study the data for emerging themes to generate a set of categories, a line-by-line microanalysis of the interview transcripts was conducted. Initial guides for creating categories were my research questions and

at this phase the goal was to establish some broad categories, each of which was capable of subsuming a wide array of data. I thus generated six broad categories: coping strategies, emotionality, perception, loyalty, help-seeking, and familial relationships. Adoption of these broad categories gave me the scope to group segments of the data, to identify themes emerging commonly across all the respondents, and to trace patterns early in the data analysis. In particular, reading the transcripts slowly and repeatedly facilitated the detection of patterns and relationships in themes. This process involved reading through the text first for one category - e.g. emotionality - then reading through again for another category, e.g. perception, which enabled me to refine the initial categories. This early phase of the coding not only sensitised me to some of the properties and dimensions of the categories that I needed to look for in the data, but also helped me to understand what was contained in the data and facilitated the identification of themes emerging (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Using as an example the category emotionality, I shall briefly describe how I classified the data to identify its properties and dimensions. In order to identify themes that depicted the emotional consequences for mothers, I analysed the emotional content of their narratives. This involved going through the interview transcripts in segments to examine the text for the language mothers used to convey the emotional aspects of their reaction to their children's abuse. Here in particular, I was keen to look for examples of the words and phrases the mothers used to describe the psychological and emotional impact on them and how they specifically conveyed their emotions, as well as the subtle nuances contained in the language they used; I was ever mindful of the importance of working with the language mothers themselves used to describe their emotional reactions for retaining the meaning they intended. Grounded theory emphasises the

importance of conceptualising data from both emic – that is, the language used by respondents to describe their experiences, and etic perspectives – that is, from the language used by the researcher to conceptualise respondents' experiences (Schwandt, 2001). Thus, the frequency with which mothers made reference to a particular emotion and in what circumstances, as well as the range of comments made about a specific emotion, were analysed. These elements assisted with the discovery of themes capturing the intense emotional reactions of mothers such as anger, sadness, grief, denial, loss and guilt. The key themes clustered around the category emotionality were then broken down into discrete parts and closely examined to establish patterns in mothers' accounts. This process helped me identify the properties and dimensions of the category of emotionality and, more generally, how it related to the other categories.

I used axial coding, which is the process of relating categories and their properties to each other to establish their interrelationships. Through the process of reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, I was able to identify that a number of distinctive themes began to emerge as prevalent ones and this allowed me to refine the coding and better understand the meaning of categories. For example, in exploring the relationships between the categories, conflictual loyalties emerged as a central and recurring theme for mothers. I was able to further delineate the component parts of mothers' conflicts and identified six major elements of conflict: conflict with self; conflict in the mother-child relationship; familial conflict; conflictual feelings towards their husband/partner; conflict about using helping services. These were all then grouped under the conceptual category of loyalty, because it provided some way of interpreting the range of information conveyed in the data.

I utilised a key scheme in grounded theory, that of constant comparisons, to compare data gathered from different mothers. For example, I compared dataset to dataset for an examination of themes and ideas: e.g., between mothers who had used formal support services and mothers who had made use of informal support networks (family or friends) as well as between those who had not made use of either; mothers who were in intimate relationships with the alleged perpetrators and those who were not, as well as comparing events pertinent to each category. Such an approach enabled me to distinguish between sub-groups of mothers and facilitated the identification of recurring themes to enable comparisons between respondents for an analysis of commonalities and differences.

In order to help me select a core category of analysis, I considered the overarching theme of loyalty and its impact on the mothering experience. In this way, it was possible to look at the conceptual linkages between all the categories to illuminate a common thread running through the data, that of divided loyalties. This further enabled an exploration of how loyalties emerged in different ways and varying degrees among sub-groups of mothers depending on the particular factors contributing to their circumstances, such as whether they were in an intimate relationship with the perpetrator or not, or whether they had the support systems of their families. I continued with the analysis until all the categories were saturated that is, when the data no longer contributed any new information about the categories. In light of the emergent ideas, I was therefore able to construct the theoretical proposition that mothers' relational systems created an arena in which they experienced conflictual loyalties that had implications for how they provided practical and emotional support to their children in the aftermath of abuse. Divided loyalties ultimately became the overall core category of analysis because of its considerable scope to build

explanations for conceptualising the complex nexus of relationships that impact the mothering role in the aftermath of their children's abuse. In particular, divided loyalties as a conceptual scheme enabled a broader account to be taken of the complexities and contradictions of mothers' responses and the factors that promoted or undermined their parenting capacity.

Two factors demonstrated the salience of divided loyalties as the core category for developing explanations of the emergent theory. First, divided loyalties were referred to frequently, but also in terms of its relationships to all the other categories there was a fit with the data. Thus, divided loyalties provided a conceptual scheme to construct a story to enable particular understandings of the ways mothers negotiated the contradictory duality of feelings of powerlessness whilst at the same time having to exercise individual agency in helping their children in the aftermath of abuse. Second, as an analytical category, divided loyalties facilitated analysis of the inherent tensions in mothers' perceptions of and expectations of themselves as mothers, and how they reconciled this with their roles as intimate partners to the perpetrator and the consequent emotional demands made on them. This provided a scheme for teasing out the sensitive issues surrounding the notion of gender roles and the cultural meanings mothers attached to their parenting to draw out the implications for how they conceived of their role as a mother in supporting their children through recovery. The last stage of the analysis involved relating the core category and emergent theory of divided loyalties to the relevant body of literature on child sexual abuse to arrive at an understanding of the findings. Here again the constant comparative method was utilised to compare the emerging theory to the body of literature on mothers in child sexual abuse. My theoretical orientation provided an approach for me to conceptualise the

significant relationship between the themes that emerged in my research findings to generate the core category of analysis, divided loyalty.

The writing of theoretical memos served a number of useful purposes at different phases of the analytical process for explaining and understanding the data. The memos helped me to develop typologies to explain what was emerging in the data. In particular, I wrote memos to formulate hypotheses for exploring the conceptual linkages between categories. The memos were also valuable tools for tracing the connections between the categories and bringing together key strands of the data. Writing analytical memos also enabled me to compare all aspects of each category for developing concepts and theoretical propositions for thinking through the emergent understanding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

One step of grounded theory that I found difficult to follow precisely as laid down by Glaser & Strauss (1967) was theoretical sampling. Grounded theory stresses that data collection should be guided by the emerging theoretical ideas. Thus, theoretical sampling is used to select participants or settings for study according to whether they have features that will support and test the development of an emerging theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I therefore sought to use theoretical sampling to search for cases or instances that did not fit the emerging explanation (Mason, 2002). For example, as an initial analysis of the first phase of interviews showed that a dominant emerging theme centred on conflictual loyalties, I attempted to use theoretical sampling to gather additional data to identify mothers that might have contradicted or disproved this idea. Theoretical sampling was used to determine which sub-groups of mothers to sample for data collection to increase the diversity of mothers to search for

alternative explanations that might disprove or contradict the emerging theory. Although I interviewed mothers with different trajectories of experiences, I felt constrained in adopting this procedure as fully as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as I had limited options for doing any further data collection because of the problems in accessing hard to reach respondents. As I discussed in *Constructing Lived Experiences* it was a major challenge accessing mothers to take part in the research. Trying to access mothers to participate in the study took an enormous amount of time, often with no positive outcome. An observation worth making here is that there are particular challenges in accessing hard to reach groups and especially for a research topic that is surrounded by secrecy, shame and stigma. Ultimately, my options for deciding what data to collect next and which sites to choose them from were very limited. However, as Hammersley concludes very few researchers use grounded theory as strictly as laid down by Glaser & Strauss (Hammersley, 1984). Strauss and Corbin (1990) also remind us that they do not wish to advocate a rigid adherence to the methods of grounded theory.

A Description of the Limitations of the Research

Using grounded theory procedures for the data analysis offered methods for deciphering a variety of subjective experiences that are infused with different interpretations, multiple meanings and competing hierarchies of “truths” for understanding complexities of lived experiences that occur within a particular social context (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). However, there are some methodological limitations to the approach I adopted that have implications for the wider inferences that are drawn from my research. In evaluating the limitations of my inquiry, I will make specific mention of three areas: validity, reliability and generalisability.

A primary limitation of my methodological approach is that I only collected data from one source; as all the data came solely from mothers, there is a question of validity in terms of testing and confirming the findings. A shortcoming of only collecting data from mothers is the extent to which their subjective interpretations, coupled with the need to give a socially desirable response so as not to discredit themselves, might have influenced their accounts (Bernard, 2001). As I did not collect data from other sources (e.g. from the children who were abused or professionals where they were involved) to corroborate mothers' stories, I could not check the plausibility of their self-reports. Thus, there is an increased risk of unreliability in respondents' accounts, which has implications for the conclusions I reached in the research.

It could be argued that researching a phenomenon that is shrouded in secrecy, relies on self-reports, and is open to competing claims about definition makes ensuring validity more complex. With hindsight, I can see that triangulating the data with other sources could have strengthened the claims I made as it is thought that triangulation increases the probability of results being more accurate (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith, 1997). For example, I could have carried out separate interviews with the children who were victimised to increase the range of data for maximising validity. However, there are complex ethical considerations in involving children in this kind of sensitive research, such as their ability to give informed consent; considering their ages and level of cognitive understanding, it might have been problematic for them to participate in ways that were not harmful. It is worth emphasising that as this study aimed to understand how mothers made sense of their children's needs in the aftermath of abuse, collecting data only from mothers fitted the research strategy and was ultimately the best approach to answering the research questions. Additionally, using the strategy of constant comparison, I compared the

findings to the body of research and related literature on mothers in child sexual abuse to try to enhance the validity of the wider inferences I had drawn, and also to locate my findings in broader theoretical debates. As Hammersley (1990) has emphasised, we need to be able to evaluate the validity of a claim to judge whether it accurately represents the phenomenon that is being studied. Furthermore, I partially used another form of triangulation to some extent, that of member checking to maximise validity. However, it was easier to get member check for validity in some cases than it was with others (e.g. the cases described in *Submission 5*). It is important to stress that the interpretive act of taking the data apart and putting it back together to construct a story of mothers' experiences meant that I assigned meanings to their words and represented their stories in ways that may have presented a distortion of their experiences; they may not have been able to easily identify their specific accounts in a way that was recognisable as their own. Here it is acknowledging that mothers' accounts have not simply spoken for themselves, but have been actively interpreted and conceptualised by me (Holland & Ramazanoglu, 1994). I echo Holland & Ramazanoglu's views that this is necessary; nevertheless there are flaws in that I will never be certain that I have come to the right conclusion. Thus, an obvious question of validity is raised.

Another limitation is in terms of ensuring reliability. It is claimed that an account is deemed to be reliable if it can be replicated by another researcher (Schwandt, 2001; Seale, 1999). However, this notion rests on the assumption that there is a deeper truth that research can reveal (Opie, 1992). Because different philosophical assumptions come to bear on the criteria for reliability, there is a school of thought amongst some qualitative researchers that the idea of replication is not necessarily helpful; instead they propose that external reliability should be addressed by

making explicit a number of principles (Le Compte and Goetz, 1982, discussed in Spencer et al, 2003; Patton, 2002). Thus, it is proposed that the status position adopted by the researcher, the nature of the data sources, the social situations in which the study was carried out, the methodology adopted and the theories and ideas that informed the study should be explicitly spelt out. Additionally, as the researcher, I was the primary research instrument; therefore, multiple sources of researcher effects that can build in bias may have distorted the findings and affected the wider inferences I have drawn. As I was a lone researcher, my epistemological position would have particularly influenced how I defined the problem, did the sampling, designed the instruments, and collected and analysed the data; I therefore was sensitised to possible sources of bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, one measure I employed to minimise the risk of bias involved seeking feedback on my emerging explanation with peer researchers in the British Sociological Association Violence Against Women Study Group during the analysis phase of the research. This helped me grapple with how I interpreted the data and allowed me to search for alternative explanations to assess the plausibility of my explanation; it also constantly reminded me that the interpretation of data is dependent on factors such as the researcher's perspective and conceptual stance (Charmaz, 1995). For example, a key element of grounded theory procedure is that the researcher should continue collecting new data until all the categories are saturated; that is, when there is nothing new emerging about the properties and dimensions of the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The question could be posed as to how I judged when the categories were saturated since so much relied on my own interpretation; it is possible that another researcher may have continued collecting new data, deciding on saturation at a different point.

A further limitation involved generalisability. It is worth emphasising that the sample is small and self-selected, and that the study is context-specific and localised. Thus, an obvious limitation involves representativeness of the data. Self-selected mothers do not represent all black mothers; therefore, the findings may reflect only the experiences of the small group of mothers in the study and there might be important differences between mothers who did not volunteer to participate. However, I have not attempted to make grand claims in my writing, but stress instead that this is what I found in this particular study. I have tried to analyse the data as carefully as I can, and one safeguard I adopted was to search for outliers to verify the representativeness of mothers' experiences. Nonetheless, as is the case with all small-scale qualitative studies, there will be inevitable flaws, and silences and absences; my claims are thus indicative and cannot be generalised to all black mothers of abused children. Understandably, there will always remain the question of whether my interpretation of mothers' accounts is accurate; it is probable that even using the same datasets and similar constructs, another researcher would reach a different conclusion. Despite these shortcomings, the story that I have constructed is no less valid; my work essentially opens up new areas of inquiry and fields of knowledge, and thus provides the basis for other researchers to develop future areas of research.

Though the issue of how validity, reliability and generalisability are established in research is the subject of competing philosophical debates, it is generally agreed that there should be a set of standard criteria for judging quality in qualitative research (Patton, 2002; Seale, 1999). Spencer et al (2003) have established a set of evaluative criteria for the Cabinet Office for appraising the quality of qualitative research and have identified a number of principles for judging the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry. Key elements identified are the defensibility of approach;

the rigour of conduct; the relationship of the researcher to the researched; the credibility of claims; the broader impact and contribution of the study (Spencer et al, 2003). In Submissions 2, 4, and 7 I have discussed aspects of these principles in detail and throughout this context paper I have given examples of how I have engaged with the way my own values, assumptions and theoretical stance underpin my work and how the context shapes the research process; most importantly, I have also shown how the use of self as the research instrument had an impact on the research process and its implications for the interpretive act (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Snape & Spencer, 2003).

Finally, in considering the limitations of my research, I have found that one of the most difficult tasks has been making transparent the research process, as commonly qualitative research on sensitive topics is messy and emotionally fraught with dilemmas; and may not necessarily follow a logical order that makes it easy to document the process in a linear method. Hyde (1994) has made the point that there is often little in research write-ups that documents the messiness and false starts in research, but reflexivity means being willing to continually reflect on the research process and acknowledge and articulate one's own limitations. Foregrounding the limitations of my work without making it meaningless has been a difficult but necessary thing to do. This is not to say that my work is not without its flaws; rather I stress the point that overtly acknowledging the limitations of one's work in a context where one is claiming an authority as a knowledge producer whilst struggling through layers of internalised narratives of self-doubt is intellectually challenging and creates anxiety-provoking dilemmas (Morley, 1995; Opie 1996). Notwithstanding, what has become clearer for me in the process of writing this paper is that despite the complexities and contradictions, as qualitative researchers we must articulate

explicitly what constitutes evidence in qualitative inquiry. I agree wholeheartedly with Ritchie and Lewis (2003) in their assertion of the value in making transparent the entire research process for scrutiny so that judgements can be made about the quality of the inquiry and the interpretations that are made.

A Critical Review of my Development as a Researcher over the Period of the Research

I will now turn to my development as a researcher and to the progression of ideas in my work over time. Writing this context paper evokes for me most powerfully that my professional practice experience as a social worker has been crucial in determining my choice of topic for inquiry and the questions I have addressed in my research. In retrospect I can see that many of the ideas I have explored arose from my experience as a social work practitioner working with families where abuse was a feature. Significantly, the ethical principles about social justice and the value and dignity of every individual that I strongly adhered to as a social worker had a major impact on my quest to develop practice that safeguards the welfare of children in their families. As stated in the introductory chapter in *Constructing Lived Experiences* (submission 7), the contextual backdrop to my research is a commitment to ensuring better outcomes for children. I firmly believe that in order to achieve such outcomes requires knowledge of the complexity of factors that impact their parents' capacity to provide care and protection for them. Therefore, my on-going development as a researcher is essentially guided by an ethic of care that is rooted in a concern for the well-being of children. To this extent it could be argued that these principles powerfully shaped my journey as a researcher and crystallised for me the value of developing reflexivity in research. Thus, my professional background as a social worker not only shaped the direction of my research, but also strongly influenced the questions I sought to interrogate in my

research, and particularly strengthened my resolve to do the kind of research that would have practical benefits for families in the child welfare system. In considering my journey as a researcher, ultimately, my professional practice experience as a social worker has thus enriched and expanded my development as a researcher. Making the transition from social work practice to an academic setting gave me the intellectual and mental space necessary to develop my ideas and thinking, as well as to broaden the scope of my research.

As can be seen in the writings submitted here, there is a clear development of ideas, and though each piece is distinctive in its own right, nevertheless, they are part of a broader project that comes together coherently. For example, my earliest work was concerned with examining social workers' attitudes to working with mothers of children who were sexually abused to expose the mother blaming that predominated (Miller, 1990). Importantly, this piece of work helped me sharpen my thinking about the mother-blaming discourse in social work and shaped the development of the ideas that have been at the centre of my empirical research with black mothers. Indeed, this piece of work provided the momentum for me to take my ideas further to investigate from black mothers' perspectives their emotional and behavioural responses to the sexual abuse of their children and ultimately the impact on their parenting. My thinking in this piece of work was to use mothers' voices to break silences and represent a particular experience. As an underlying concern of this research is that children's safety and long term emotional needs can be enhanced by effective professional intervention with non-abusing mothers, my ideas in relation to the importance of children's voices being made visible was crystallised. This process is most clearly apparent in the *Giving Voice to Experiences* paper discussed in submission 8. For example, I think this piece of work encapsulate my ideas most succinctly in bringing together the

underlying concern in all my work: the paramountcy of children's welfare, and in particular their safety and emotional well-being. The arguments articulated in the *Giving Voice to Experiences* paper is building upon and expanding on discussions in my earlier works and linking them to feminist thought and child welfare debates. This piece of work, more than any other, provides the best example of how my ideas come together, and is strongest in making the links with social work practice. Perhaps more importantly, this last piece of writing shows how my ideas have moved on to develop a gendered perspective of race for examining how black children construct meaning to their experiences of familial maltreatment. In sum, it is evident that not only are my works related by the subject matter of child abuse and discourses of race and gender, but one also can trace a clear development of the ideas over time to elucidate how the work comes together as a coherent whole.

Evidence and exemplification of claims made that the selected works are equivalent to a PhD by the conventional thesis route

A strong case can be made for why my work is equivalent to a PhD by conventional route. In terms of originality, as can be seen from the work submitted here, I have produced a single authored book, several chapters in key texts, as well as many peer-reviewed journal articles based on my original research to generate new scholarship. These works taken as a whole demonstrate my capacity to produce a substantial and coherent body of original research to extend the feminist, anti-racist, and social work discourses on child sexual abuse. Additionally, my work shows a high level of research and scholarship and an in-depth understanding of the subject area. Furthermore, I have produced one of the first comprehensive analyses of child

sexual abuse in black families. As a result I am claiming that my body or work is equivalent to a PhD by conventional thesis route. In terms of length, accounting for overlaps and repetitions, my work taken as a whole, together with this context paper adds up to over the required 80, 000 words for a PhD.

Conclusion

In summary, the goal of this context paper has been to discuss and critically evaluate my work. Analysis of my writings reveals a distinguishing feature of race and gender as issues of power and therefore important sites of exploration in child abuse discourses. I have attempted to give a sense of the context of my writings and the perspectives that contributed to how I developed my analyses. Thematically, my writings reflected my feminist project of employing black feminist thought to open up new questions about child sexual abuse. Throughout, I have critically reflected on the theoretical, methodological and epistemological bases of my work and emphasised the importance of intersectionality as an organising concept for expanding our understandings of child sexual abuse. In this paper I have provided evidence to show that in addition to building on existing knowledge about the subject, my work is distinctive in opening up new ways to understand the complexities of child sexual abuse in black families, thereby making an original contribution to the debates on child abuse. I have thus demonstrated that my work offers new theoretical insights into the nexus of race and gender in child abuse discourses and is equivalent to a PhD by conventional thesis route.

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